



WAYS TO COMMUNITY...

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Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission

WAYS TO COMMUNITY

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Preface

Appointed by the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission was asked to examine questions which it had been impossible to deal with in detail in the 1972 Malta report on "The Gospel and the Church".

The first fruits of the Commission's work on this mandate was a document on the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, published in 1980. A study on the ministry in the church with special reference to episcopacy was announced at the same time and is now being prepared for publication. But the Commission wishes first to present the following document on "Ways to Community". This seeks to bring out the significance of the statement found in the Malta report: "A process of gradual rapprochement is necessary in which various stages are possible" (No. 73).

In the course of its work the Joint Commission came to the conclusion that, if there were to be any further progress in interchurch relationships, clarity was needed and a certain measure of agreement, both about the goal (Part I) and about concrete steps towards unity (Part II). A bird's eye view is necessary if we are to see how the various themes discussed in the dialogue and the tasks set us for cooperation fit into the total picture, lest we find ourselves speaking and acting at cross purposes and misunderstanding one another.

"Ways to Community" is a summary of points of agreement rather than a study of previously undiscussed or unresolved problems. The comments to be found in it are based on statements from the Roman Catholic side and the Lutheran side, as well as on certain declarations by the World Council of Churches, reflecting a general ecumenical consensus. In Part II, with its more practical and pastoral focus, we offer recommendations and suggestions. It may come as a surprise to readers, as it did to the members of the Commission itself, to find that we already have a remarkably similar vision of the goal of the ecumenical movement, and that there is an astonishing number of important practical steps which we can take together to achieve this goal.

In the present situation, on the other hand, it seems to us quite essential to clarify in much closer detail the form of church unity we are seeking as Christians. Exhaustive and sometimes heated discussions have taken place on this theme in recent years. The Joint Commission plans, therefore, to produce a document on "Models of Unity" in which it will attempt to present both the different concepts of unity and the various stages of convergence in a way which brings out their nuances more clearly than has so far been achieved.

Some basic elements for this work are already to be found in the present document. We hope it will be of help in the approach to the unresolved problems. Above all, we hope it will encourage Christians to move towards a more intimate fellowship in faith, prayer and life than has been the case until now. We commend it for careful attention in the hope and with the prayer that God may use it to further the unity which is his will for his people and for his world.

Augsburg, 23 February 1980

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Introduction

1. The disunity of Christians causes offence and distress to both church and world. It quite "openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature"¹. Moreover, it impairs the ever-urgent call for Christian service to the world (cf. Is 61:1f. and Lk 4:18f.).

2. We are therefore obligated to do all we can to help overcome the division. We must strive, among other things, for a maximum "common vision of the unity of the Church at every level in obedience to the faith"². We need a "common vision" because we shall grow further apart if we do not aim towards a common goal. If we have conflicting views of this goal, we shall, if we are consistent, move in opposite directions. We need unity "at every level" because it affects all areas of our life. Whatever the circumstances in which Christians find themselves, they must be concerned about their unity in Christ and each is called upon to make a contribution. This demands "obedience to the faith". Only what the Lord wills, what he gives and commissions is decisive. He discloses what this is only to believers, and calls them in turn to witness in word and deed, personally and communally to what they have received in faith.

3. This is the spirit in which we want to say together in "obedience to the faith" how we as Roman Catholic and Lutheran Christians see (I) the *goal of unity* and (II) the *steps towards unity* which seem necessary to us.

¹ Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, No. 1.

² Discussion Paper on the Ecumenical Role of the World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement, 1974, No. 53.

Part I

Unity as Goal

Introduction

4. The goal of unity is *given* to us *beforehand*. It is not constructed or manipulated, but is received. It is not a totally new reality reserved for a distant future, but is in its fundamental elements already present and active among us.

5. The goal of unity is discernible in the word and work of the Lord, in the testimony of Holy Scripture, and in the teaching and life of the church.

6. The unity we seek has *already begun to be realized*. Despite our sins, the Lord has not ceased his unifying activity. Just as he went to his death "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52), so he continues to live and work "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). Against all powers threatening Christian unity from within and without, he is bringing his work to its goal through the might of his resurrection and ascension in the Holy Spirit. He is completing what he has begun.

7. By the *gifts* he has entrusted to his church, he leads the scattered flock towards full unity. Without active loyalty to these gifts, the goal of unity remains unrecognized and unattained.

8. Regarding the concretization of the unity already given and yet also awaited and worked for in the future, it must be said:

Christian unity is (a) a blessing of the Triune God, a work which he accomplishes, (b) by means he chooses, (c) in ways he determines, (d) shaped by basic structures he has established, and (e) directed towards a unique, truly all-encompassing community.

a. Community Through Grace

9. Like every good gift, unity also comes from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

The will and work of the Father is "in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him" (Eph 1:10). In the Father is the origin of all the Son does for unity. "And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:22-23).

10. The basic work of unification occurs in the *incarnation* of the Son of God, in whom divinity and humanity are inseparably united in one person. Everything *Jesus Christ* says, does and suffers lives from this unity and has its aim "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). He suffered death on the cross for the sake of unity. Unity is integral to his gift of redemption and reconciliation, and to participation in his glory: "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (Jn 17:22).

11. Through his blood the wall of partition is torn down which separates human beings from each other and from God (Eph 2:11-22). His crucifixion is judgment on all sins, including sins against unity, and yet is the acquittal of all sinners. The peace which unifies is established "by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). Thus unity always stands *under the sign of the cross*. In the midst of contradiction and opposition, misunderstanding and abuse, it lives from Jesus Christ's Lord. "It is by entering into His passion for the redemption of a sinful and divided world that the Church finds its unity in its crucified and risen Lord."³

12. Jesus Christ accomplishes his work on the cross and all other works of unification *in the Holy Spirit*. Since he wants his own to be one as the Father and he himself are one, he promises them that same Spirit which is the bond of unity between Father and Son. Pentecost is the great sign to the church that the Lord fulfils this promise.

13. Incorporation into living unity takes place only through the Holy Spirit. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13; cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11). "For any achievement of a fuller unity than that now manifest, we are wholly dependent upon the Spirit's presence and governance."⁴ The Spirit revives what is dead and unites what is separated into an all-encompassing community. Christian unity exists in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the community of the Holy Spirit.

³ *The Evanston Report*. The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston 1954 (London: SCM Press, 1955), Report of Section I, No. 9, p. 85.

⁴ *The New Delhi Report*. The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1961 (New York: Association Press, 1962), Report of the Section on Unity, No. 9, p. 119 (hereafter: New Delhi).

b. Mediation of Community

14. Since we cannot find, much less construct, life and unity in Christ on our own, we must rely on their mediation through the Holy Spirit. As the Bible testifies, this occurs through (1) the Lord's word and (2) his sacraments, (3) with the help of the diversified ministries of the whole people of God. "The Church as the body of Christ lives by its Lord's gifts in Word and Sacrament; it knows it is called, gathered and sanctified to faith by the Holy Spirit and it exists as God's people in the world as a human fellowship."⁵

1. Word

15. In his high-priestly prayer for unity, Jesus says, "I have given them thy word ... Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (Jn 17: 14,17). "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn 10: 3), "so there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10: 16). Whenever and wherever we hear and trust his voice, and allow ourselves to be called again and again to the shepherd and to the flock despite disintegrating forces, there unity becomes reality. Thus we must listen together to the word of God and faithfully cling to the one gospel (cf. Gal 1: 6-10) as indispensable steps along the road to full unity.

"Christ Himself builds the Church and in doing so creates its unity"⁶ in his word. This bound up with his sacramental action.

2. Sacrament

16. The same letter to the Galatians which emphasizes that from one gospel comes one faith also stresses one baptism as source of unity. It is written, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3: 26-28). Christ forms his church "by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5: 26).

17. Furthermore, he nourishes it with his flesh and blood. Not only is the individual recipient thereby benefited, but the whole church is built up. The believers become one body by receiving the one *body of the Lord*. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all

⁵ *Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran World Federation*. Report of the Working Group on the Interrelations Between the Various Bilateral Dialogues (Geneva, 1977), No. 171. See also *Lutheran Identity* (Strasbourg: Institute for Ecumenical Research, 1977), No. 7.

⁶ *Ecumenical Relations*, No. 181.

partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10: 17).⁷ Where "baptism and the Lord's Supper are dispensed in accordance to the New Testament charge, there Christ is truly present, grants reconciliation and gathers his community"⁸.

18. *According to Catholic conviction*, there are, together with the chief basic sacraments of baptism and eucharist,⁹ five further sacraments: confirmation, penance, extreme unction, ordination and marriage. In each of these, Catholic faith sees the Lord at work bestowing grace and creating unity. In each, not only the individual recipient, but the whole church is involved¹⁰ which sees itself as "sacrament of unity"¹¹, as sign and instrument "of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind"¹².

19. *The Lutheran conviction* also is that the Lord does not bestow his grace exclusively through the preached word and the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Confession and pastoral care, as well as ordination, confirmation and marriage between believers are understood as actions in which human beings are promised and granted grace, even though it is generally held that these acts should not be seen as sacraments in the full sense.¹³

3. Ministry

20. The church, which lives by word and sacrament, is at the same time called to their service. The Lord entrusts each *member* with specific gifts and tasks. "From whom [Christ] the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4: 16; cf. Col 2: 19).

21. Within this context, the service of the *special ministry* is indispensable. "With the Word to be proclaimed and the sacraments to be administered, the church's ministry is also divinely instituted and it is conferred through ordination. It is Christ himself who acts through this office and its func-

⁷ Cf. *The Eucharist*, Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1980), Nos. 25-28.

⁸ *Lutheran Identity*, No. 26.

⁹ Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 7.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, No. 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 1.

¹³ Cf. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XIII, 3-17, The Book of Concord, pp. 211ff.; The Smalcald Articles, III, IV, The Book of Concord, p. 310. See also Report of the Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Study Commission on "The Gospel and the Church". *Lutheran World*, Vol. XIX, No. 3, 1972, pp. 268f., No. 59 (hereafter: Malta).

tions."¹⁴ "The essential and specific function of the special ministry is: to assemble and build up the Christian community, by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, and presiding over the liturgical and sacramental life of the eucharistic community."¹⁵

22. Yet though Lutherans and Catholics both affirm the special ministry, they differ in their views of its *concrete shape(s)*. According to *Catholic conviction*, Jesus Christ established the church "by sending forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father (cf. Jn 20: 21). He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world. In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship"¹⁶.

23. Also according to *Lutheran understanding*, the individual congregation is essentially related to the church as a whole. There is a need beyond the local congregation for leadership services (*episcopē*) with pastoral responsibility for proclamation, sacraments and church unity. Thus in addition to the office of parish pastor, there is a place for supracongregational ministries in the church. Although Lutherans do not regard the historic episcopacy as based on an explicit irrevocable command from the Lord valid for all times and situations, yet this polity arose through the work of the Holy Spirit, and there are historical and ecumenical reasons for seriously considering its restoration in Lutheran churches. Further, a ministry serving the unity of the church as a whole is, for Lutherans, in accord with the will of the Lord, but without its concrete form having been fixed once for all.

c. Realization of Community

24. If community in Christ is to be realized, we must accept the unifying gifts of the Lord despite all temptations to do otherwise. Only where there is (1) common faith, (2) hope and (3) love does unity live, grow and bear fruit.

1. Unity of Faith

25. *Only in faith* is a human being able to recognize the gift of God and who it is who speaks to him (cf. Jn 4: 10). When Christians believe, the

¹⁴ *Lutheran Identity*, No. 28.

¹⁵ *One Baptism, One Eucharist And a Mutually Recognized Ministry*. Three agreed statements (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978⁵, Faith and Order Paper No. 73) (hereafter: Accra), The Ministry, No. 15; see also on the understanding of the ministry, Malta, Nos. 47-67.

¹⁶ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 18.

promise is fulfilled: "They will heed my voice" and "there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). On the one hand, individuals are "added" (Acts 2:41) to the one church, and, on the other hand, unity itself is thus constantly realized anew and grows to its fullness until we all come "to the unity of the faith" (Eph 4:13).¹⁷

26. The yes of faith must affect *all areas of life*. That is why witnessing, confessing and teaching are an essential part of it.¹⁸ Everything which fosters common witness, common confession and common teaching not only leads towards unity, but is already lived unity — unity in faith, unity in truth. There are, it should be remembered, different ways of expressing or articulating the community given or achieved in witness, confession and teaching. "A fundamental unity in faith exists wherever church and church communities confess Jesus Christ as true God and true man and as only mediator of salvation according to the scriptures to the glory of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."¹⁹

2. Unity of Hope

27. "Unity requires companionship in struggle and hope."²⁰ The call "to the one hope" belongs to "one body and one Spirit" (Eph 4:4). "The unity of the Church will be achieved as Christians are united in the anticipation and expectation of God's future."²¹

28. Whoever thinks that the present state of ecumenical relations is either so bad that no decisive improvement is possible, or so good that no decisive improvement is necessary, is acting *in opposition to hope*. In both cases, unity is impaired along with hope.

29. The service to unity demanded of all Christians must be the expression of an unswerving, unwearied and *unabridged Christian hope*. "Ecumenical endeavours therefore have their deepest basis in the knowledge of the kingdom of God or the new world, which has already come in Jesus Christ but whose fulfilment remains an object of Christian hope."²²

¹⁷ Cf. *Ecumenical Relations*, No. 37.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, No. 161.

¹⁹ Gemeinsame Synode der Bistümer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Pastorale Zusammenarbeit der Kirchen im Dienst an der christlichen Einheit (Würzburg, 1974), 3.21.

²⁰ *Breaking Barriers — Nairobi 1975*, The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (London: SPCK and Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), Report of Section II, No. IV, 13-18, p. 64 (hereafter: Nairobi).

²¹ *What Kind of Unity?* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1974, Faith and Order Paper 69), p. 120, A. II.

²² *Ecumenical Relations*, No. 39.

3. Unity of Love

30. The community grows in Christ to the degree in which faith and hope become *effective in love*. In love, the human being becomes fully receptive to the gifts of the giving Lord; in love, the person learns to follow and "gather" with God (cf. Mt 12:30; Lk 11:23). "Love ... binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). It unites the individual members "into one fully committed fellowship"²³, and simultaneously leads to communion with the Triune God. Thus the high-priestly prayer (Jn 17:26) concludes with the petition "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them". Through love, we can "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, ... makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4:15f.).

31. The *eucharist* is an essential part of the acceptance of God's unifying gifts. In its communal celebration, we confess our common faith, witness to our common hope, give a sign of our common love in terms of "one fully committed fellowship".

d. The Form of Community

32. There is a basic pattern of unity through which all its aspects are interrelated. Unity in Christ is unity in (1) visibility, (2) diversity, and (3) dynamism.

1. Visibility

33. Both "one body and one Spirit" (Eph 4:4) belong to the common life in Christ. "We want to stress the fact that the unity we seek should be an outward, visible unity which is becoming historically manifest in the life of the churches."²⁴ We believe "that we live under the obligation to make this unity historically manifest, visible and recognizable to the world, that it may believe"²⁵.

This by no means, however, signifies a rigid uniformity: living unity in Christ is essentially manifold and dynamic.

2. Diversity

34. Unity in Christ does not exist despite and in opposition to diversity, but is given *with and in diversity*. The work of the one unifying Spirit of

²³ New Delhi, No. 2, p. 116.

²⁴ *Ecumenical Relations*, No. 205.

²⁵ *In Christ — A New Community*, The Proceedings of the Sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, June 13-25, 1977 (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1977), Models of Unity, No. 13, p. 173.

God does not begin with the uniting of the already separated, but rather creates and maintains diverse realities precisely in order to lead them into the unity of love.

35. The one body is composed of *many members* (1 Cor 12: 4-30; Rom 12: 4-8; Eph 4: 7-16). "A lively variety marks corporate life in the one Body of one Spirit."²⁶

36. The different members have become part of a larger whole in a *reconciled diversity* in which differences have not been dimmed, but highlighted and thus made beneficial. "Thus in their diversity all bear witness to the admirable unity of the Body of Christ. This very diversity of graces, ministries, and works gathers the children of God into one, because 'all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit' (1 Cor 12: 11)"²⁷.

37. The Pentecostal Spirit addresses everyone "in his own native language" (Acts 2: 8). It testifies to *the one gospel in many tongues*. It allows many forms of proclamation, reception and response. It renews and unites the most diverse forms of teaching and piety, life-style and law, tradition and rite, and thus guides more deeply into "all the truth" (Jn 16: 13) and into full unity. Thus life together in Christ requires individuals as well as communities gratefully to recognize their own talents, to husband them faithfully and to place them willingly at the disposal of the whole. At the same time, they must be open to the special gifts which others have received. "While preserving unity in essentials, let all members of the Church, according to the office entrusted to each, preserve a proper freedom in the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites and even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity be exercised."²⁸

3. Dynamism

38. As *historical reality*, the unity in Christ exists in a process of becoming; as living reality, it is directed towards growing and bearing fruit even though decay constantly threatens.

39. *In a world afflicted by sin*, unity is forever involved in the struggle between "Spirit and flesh", "light and darkness", good and evil, between Christ and all God's adversaries. It is inevitably affected by the dramatic dynamism of this struggle which lasts until the end of the world. Threatened from within and without, the church is called to strive for unity and salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil 2: 12) and to trust fully in the Lord.

²⁶ New Delhi, No. 10, p. 120.

²⁷ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 32.

²⁸ Ibid., Decree on Ecumenism, No. 4.

40. To the extent that this happens, Christian unity is drawn into the *dynamism of grace*. As unity in *faith*, it grows and works, just as faith does. Like faith, life together in Christ is "being-on-the-way". As unity in *hope*, it must, like hope itself, reach out for what is to come. Like hope, unity lives more on what is to come than on what is. It is never satisfied with what has been attained and never despairs because of the unattained. As unity in *love*, it never reaches its final consummation on earth. Like love, life together in Christ always strives for more than what has been achieved.

41. Like all Christian life in this world, unity stands under the sign of the "already" and the "not yet". Because a gift has been received which cannot be comprehended, there is the assurance of an ineffably greater grace yet to come. "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him" (1 Jn 3 : 2). "The Lord who is bringing all things into full unity at the last is he who constrains us to seek the unity which he wills for his Church on earth here and now."²⁹

e. All-Encompassing Community

42. Life together in Christ is lived in *manifold personal and social relationships*. (1) They are rooted and flow into the Triune God, (2) they encompass all believers and (3) finally all human beings.

1. Unity of the One Triune God

43. "The love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit is the source and goal of the unity which the Triune God wills for all men and creation."³⁰

44. Christian unity is created in the *image and likeness of the Triune God*. "The highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit."³¹ Thus the plea in the high-priestly prayer is, "even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17 : 21).

45. Christian unity is lived in *personal fellowship* with the Triune God. Inasmuch as human beings are enabled to live, through the Holy Spirit, as sons and daughters of the Father with and in Christ, they become truly one. "And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1 : 3). "I in them and thou in me, that they may become per-

²⁹ New Delhi, No. 1, p. 116.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, No. 2.

factly one" (Jn 17: 23). This takes place through the Holy Spirit, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12: 13), "one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6: 17). The more intensive the believer's personal nearness to the Triune God, the stronger is the bond uniting him to the neighbour. "For they can achieve depth and ease in strengthening mutual brotherhood to the degree that they enjoy profound communion with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit."³²

2. Unity of All Believers in Christ

46. Unity in Christ is both *personal and social*. It consists not of an external bond but of personal ties. These ties are actualized ever anew where human beings obey the call of grace. They *transcend the limits of space and time* and encompass all believers. "All in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship ... all ... at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages."³³

47. "Such a fellowship means for those who participate in it nothing less than a renewed mind and spirit, a full participation in common praise and prayer, the shared realities of penitence and forgiveness, mutuality in suffering and joy, listening together to the same Gospel, responding in faith, obedience and service, joining in the one mission of Christ in the world, a self-forgetting love for all for whom Christ died."³⁴

3. Unity for the World

48. Like Christ, his church exists "*for the life of the world*" (Jn 6: 51). Its members are to be one "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17: 21). Their corporate witness together with their common life is to lead the world to the faith on which its salvation depends.

49. Just as *mission and unity* are intimately connected in Jesus' high-priestly prayer, so they belong together in the life of the church. The church can fulfil its mission only to the extent it is one. It will be one only in so far as it obeys the call of its Lord and proclaims the gospel to all creation (cf. Mk 16: 15). Its *missionary* activity has a twofold goal: "evangelization and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where she has not yet taken root"³⁵. Neither is fully attainable without unity. The good news of reconciling love appears incredible when

³² Ibid., No. 7.

³³ New Delhi, No. 2, p. 116.

³⁴ Ibid., No. 10, p. 119.

³⁵ Vatican II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, No. 6.

the messengers are unreconciled or even in conflict with each other. Similarly, the planting of the church is gravely endangered when it suffers from schism at its roots. "Hence, by the same mandate which makes missions necessary, all the baptized are called to be gathered into one flock, and thus to be able to bear unanimous witness before the nations to Christ their Lord."³⁶

50. Moreover, Christian unity is of decisive help in promoting yet other forms of *service in the world*. The corporate life in Christ is to be "the sign of the coming unity of humankind"³⁷ and an aid to its free and just development. "The surrender of confessional complacency, and the respect for the convictions of others, helps to diminish the explosiveness of human and social conflicts. The struggle for fellowship among all Christians, in which social and cultural differences, race membership and national ties have lost their divisive power, is part of the great battle for the healing of a world lacerated by tension and enmity."³⁸

51. On the other hand, the one church *receives and learns from all* fellow human beings. Christian striving for unity is influenced for good and ill by secular events. Social, political and cultural activity cannot produce Christian unity, but may greatly contribute to its realization. Much in the modern ecumenical movement has undoubtedly first become possible through general historical developments. Even hostile actions can serve the corporate life in Christ, for many who had not sufficiently heeded the Lord's call to unity have been drawn closer together by persecution and need. On the other hand, secular factors can jeopardize Christian unity both from within and without. False ideals, for example, can block insight into what is essential to unity and set ideologies in place of faith. Similarly, efforts towards unification confined to single nations, races or classes can lead to erroneous ways of seeing and practising Christian unity.

52. Both church and world in their manifold interrelationships are constantly in need of the creative love of God. They are always *in every way* dependent on "the God . . . who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4: 17). The Lord who calls the dead to fruitful life can overcome all threats and obstacles to Christian unity and turn that unity into an effective instrument for the salvation of the world. He who creates that which is truly new can transform our wasted opportunities into reality. He can create new forms of unity

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Nairobi, No. 7, p. 61.

³⁸ "More than Church Unity", Study Document for the Fifth Assembly. *Lutheran World*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, 1970, pp. 49f.

beyond what we have yet glimpsed or conceived. We cannot speak of them adequately, but we can together remain open for them. If we keep our eyes fixed on the unity and mission of the church and the redemption and consummation of the world, there is nothing which we cannot expect from the Lord who says, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21 : 5).

Part II

Steps Towards Unity

Introduction

53. We have spoken with one voice in "obedience to the faith" about the "goal of unity" in the sense of a full spiritual and ecclesial fellowship. Our common testimony on this point impels us to address the question of what concrete "steps towards unity" can be taken by Roman Catholic and Lutheran Christians and churches now and in the immediate future. Only by means of such concrete steps shall we draw nearer to "the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ ... in order that the world may believe"³⁹.

54. Our search is for steps in "a process of gradual rapprochement ... in which various stages are possible"⁴⁰. In such an open process of growing together we can and should set our eyes on *intermediate goals* and keep on re-examining the methods of advance. By moving in this way from an incomplete to a more and more complete communion, we shall be able to take account of a wide variety of different historical, theological and regional situations. In being willing to enter into such an open process, we are well aware that God the Holy Spirit himself will show us steps and lead us in paths which for the most part we cannot at present envisage.

55. In accordance with our reflections on "unity as goal", we now propose to ask what "steps towards unity" are implied by (a) the grace of ecclesial communion, (b) the "means" which constitute it, (c) the spiritual manner of its realization, (d) its structural form and (e) its universality.

a. Community Through Grace

56. What "steps towards unity" are implied by the nature of ecclesial fellowship (*communio*) as a gift of God's grace which precedes all our efforts?

³⁹ Constitution of the World Council of Churches, III.

⁴⁰ Malta, No. 73.

57. We are first reminded that, because ecclesial communion is a gift of God's grace, we must give priority to *spiritual ecumenism* in our striving for church unity. "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from newness of attitudes, from self-denial and unstinted love, that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow towards maturity. We should therefore pray to the divine Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others, and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity towards them."⁴¹ The Reformation also understood itself as a call to repentance and renewal in the one church; indeed, it demanded that the life of Christians be a daily penitence.

58. In the relationship of our churches, as well as in that of Roman Catholic and Lutheran Christians to each other, such a basic attitude will be concretized in these *spiritual steps towards unity*:

— We shall note with deep remorse that, in light of the history of our separation, we cannot one-sidedly shift the blame to our partners, but must instead confess our own fault for the separation.

— We must become open to discovering great spiritual treasures in the past and the present of other churches and to receiving in our encounters with them all the gifts, stimulation and guidance which these treasures offer.

— We discover that, despite the divisions caused by our sin, the Spirit has maintained through its work in our churches a fundamental fellowship which constitutes the primary precondition for all our striving for the visible unity of the church.

59. Spiritual ecumenism has been furthered through general historical studies as well as special *research* in the history of theology and doctrine. During the past decades these have already helped to *reduce prejudice, improve knowledge and provide a fairer evaluation of the past and the present* of both churches, particularly the history of the schism since the 16th century. But we deem it essential:

— to continue this process of removing confessionally conditioned prejudices and misjudgments of other churches from the entirety of theological research and consciousness as well as from textbooks of church history and systematic theology, and to develop an ecumenical view of church history and history of doctrine since the 16th century. The joint Roman Catholic/Lutheran study on the Augsburg Confession is a promising example;⁴²

⁴¹ Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, No. 7.

⁴² *Confessio Augustana — Bekenntnis des einen Glaubens*. Gemeinsame Untersuchung katholischer und lutherischer Theologen. Edited by H. Meyer and H. Schütte, together with E. Iserloh, W. Kasper, G. Kretschmar, W. Lohff, G. W. Forell, J. McCue (Frankfurt/M. — Paderborn, 1980).

— beyond the area of specialized theological literature, to eliminate tendentious school-book accounts of the 16th century breach and of the churches involved in it and, more generally, to arrive at a wider and more critical view of the past and the present of one's own church;

— to strive for an ever more intensive and direct knowledge of the other church (its worship, piety, artistic and cultural achievements, and service to society) and thereby gain a more vivid impression of its spiritual wealth and greater openness to closer fellowship.

60. Such steps can be signs of conversion by which both churches show that they are united by the joint resolve, not to conform to the world, but rather to overcome every form of self-righteousness.

b. Mediation of Community

61. What then, are the "steps towards unity" which should be taken in the separate as well as joint practice of our churches in the light of the bestowal of the spirit of fellowship through word, sacrament and diaconal service.

1. Word

62. It is the conviction of both our churches that spiritual fellowship in Christ is imparted through the word. This word of salvation is basic to the church and is normatively given in *Holy Scripture*. It is therefore an ever-necessary step towards unity for both churches to live and be guided in their spiritual life by the testimony of Holy Scripture. This makes it essential to utilize the full range of scriptural utterances — rather than simply a selection — in theology, preaching and in group and personal Bible study. This certainly does not exclude the quest for a centre of Scripture, for central and less central statements, and for rules of interpretation which derive therefrom. Yet the failure on both sides to hear and accept the full range of scriptural testimonies has contributed in no small measure to the estrangement of the churches.

63. Both churches must increasingly *adopt a common orientation* towards Holy Scripture. This includes jointly sponsored translations of the Bible, common commentaries on biblical books, and the kind of joint ministerial and congregational Bible studies which are already being carried out in many places. The coordination of the scriptural readings in the worship services (*pericopes*) of both churches should also be considered.

64. It is the conviction of both churches that God's word is also transmitted through *church traditions* even though they differ in their theological evaluations. The canon of Holy Scripture is certainly itself a weighty

and fundamental part of church tradition.⁴³ Further, the creeds and official dogmatic decisions of the undivided church have special importance. Greater consideration of the early church and medieval pre-Reformation tradition shared by both churches could function as a decisive step towards unity. Strenuous efforts to understand the diverging traditions since the 16th century are also important as steps on the way to unity. Here, too, the ecumenical treatment of the Augsburg Confession provides an important example.

65. Cooperative concern for Scripture and tradition includes critical *hermeneutical reflection*. It is an important theological task to seek for common principles of interpretation of Scripture and of the differing church traditions. Such principles could help significantly in dealing with controversial issues such as the development of the office of the ministry. These principles must acknowledge the impossibility of simply ignoring our traditions or surrendering our historical identities on the way to unity. On the other hand, however, it must be remembered that our identities are themselves involved in a process which leads us to relate our traditions in new ways to Holy Scripture and to interpret them critically in terms of our contemporary understanding of reality for the sake of today's witness to the world. By noting the converging elements in this process, we are enabled to arrive at a newly conscious and determined identity.

2. Sacraments

66. Spiritual communion in Christ is also imparted through the sacraments. It would thus be a decisive step on the way to unity if in each of the two churches the sacraments were to assume a *central significance* through the dedicated and active participation of believers in their celebration.

67. Consciousness of the basic importance of *baptism* for both salvation and fellowship must be promoted in both churches. A renewal of baptismal practice can above all contribute to this end. Both children and adults should be increasingly baptized in the worship service of the whole congregation; water should be used in such a way that its symbolic significance is unmistakable; and the correct baptismal formula should never be omitted; remembrance of baptism should be fostered, and particular stress should be laid on a Christian education as deriving from or leading to baptism. If these conditions are fulfilled, as many churches have discovered, all doubts regarding the mutual recognition of baptism become superfluous.

68. "In the Eucharist, too, it is progress towards the centre which brings us nearer to each other."⁴⁴ Despite the legitimate variety of existing pos-

⁴³ Cf. Malta, No. 17.

⁴⁴ *The Eucharist*, No. 75.

sibilities, the liturgical form of the *Lord's Supper* in both churches should have the basic features and elements summarized in the document on the Lord's Supper.⁴⁵ Both churches must promote knowledge and understanding of the different but not church-dividing customs in the celebration of the eucharist (*e.g.* as regards liturgical vestments, sign of the cross, kneeling), and the differences which exist even within the two churches must be respected. In any case, the festive character of the eucharist should be emphasized enough to endear this celebration to the congregations. There should also be more eucharistic services designed especially for children and adolescents. At present, after periods of neglect, there is a renewal of eucharistic practice in Lutheran churches. It is urgently necessary to integrate the celebration of the eucharist fully into the main Sunday service and to urge congregations to commune more frequently. Care should be taken to deal reverently with the consecrated elements after the eucharistic celebration. Both churches should together endeavour to define the conditions for admission to the Lord's Supper — both with regard to age and to the various pastoral needs.

69. In reference to the other rites which the Roman Catholic Church regards as sacraments, theological endeavours have led to a better mutual understanding. Confession and penance, which the Augsburg Confession treats in conjunction with the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, have become a particular pastoral task for both churches in which it is necessary to rethink the understanding of sin. The Lutheran tradition does not fundamentally reject the application of the concept of sacrament to the office of the ministry and ordination, and both churches hold that through the act of ordination the Holy Spirit with his gracious gifts takes the ordinand into service.⁴⁶ According to Lutheran understanding and practice, weddings and confirmation are also acts of grace to be celebrated amidst the prayers of the congregation.⁴⁷

3. Service

70. Both churches hold that the imparting of spiritual fellowship through word and sacrament needs the ministry of *ordained office-holders*. The ministry of these office-holders is for both churches inseparably connected with the ministry carried on by the whole congregation through the manifold gifts of its members in proclamation, prayer and action. Yet we must move beyond this common starting point. The ministry is at present under discussion both within and between our churches, and further theological and canonical clarifications of the concepts of the ministerial office and of

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, No. 76; and Accra, *The Eucharist*, No. 28.

⁴⁶ Cf. Malta, No. 59.

⁴⁷ See above, No. 19.

ordination are essential steps towards unity. Such clarifications must constantly keep in mind the views and discussions in the other church. The way ministry is exercised must be marked by the spirit of brotherhood and partnership, by readiness to serve and by deep piety. When practice becomes credible, it will be easier to eliminate distorted views of the ministry and to achieve ecumenical agreement in this area.

71. Since both the success and failure of ecumenical rapprochement depend heavily on the church's ministers, stress must be laid on their acquiring *ecumenical awareness and experience*. Ecumenical awareness needs to be developed by permeating *theological education* with ecumenism. This is not merely a matter of providing basic information regarding the state and progress of the ecumenical and theological dialogue. Moreover, there are already examples of cooperation between theologians of both churches in a single educational institution and also cases of integrated theological education for which both churches are jointly responsible. It would be desirable to expand these initiatives and develop new ones in other places. The existence of such ecumenical institutions can help insure that theologians of the future will contribute even more than in the past to the ecumenical dialogue.

72. The growth of ecumenical consciousness should also lead to regular *ecumenical retreats and courses of study* for ministers. Joint academic study of pastoral concerns and of the gospel entrusted to us would thus be combined with the spiritual experience of common prayer and worship and with exchanges on the personal dimensions of faith. It is necessary for theological reflection and spiritual experience to interact in order to avoid intellectualizing the dialogue or engaging in unreflective pastoral practice. Indeed, all aspects of the inter-church dialogue should be characterized by the interaction of doctrinal discussions and spirituality.

c. Realization of Community

73. What "steps towards unity" are suggested by looking at the realization of spiritual community in faith, hope and love?

1. Community of Faith

74. Encounters between Roman Catholics and Lutherans on matters of faith have shifted increasingly in the last decades from confrontation and polemics towards a *dialogue* committed to the joint search for the *fullness of truth*. Dialogue requires openness towards the testimony of others regarding the faith and serves to test one's own understanding of faith and of the doctrinal tradition in which one stands. The purpose of mutual questioning in fraternal encounters is to manifest and recognize the truth

in all its diversity or else to correct and formulate anew previous views. Unanswered questions are also bearable given the presence of a sincere desire for "fraternal rivalry"⁴⁸, and providing they stimulate growth together into the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4: 15; 1 Cor 13: 9-11).

75. The dialogue between our churches has led in the last few years to the production of documents in which it has been possible to make joint statements on questions of faith where church-dividing contradictions previously prevented unity.⁴⁹ The reception of these results of the dialogue by our churches is an urgent task and step towards unity. Such a reception can occur in many ways: ministers may study these documents and make them fruitful in their preaching and practice, or the documents can be used in the education of church workers, or congregational groups can get to know them. In each of these cases, it makes good sense to involve the members of both churches in the process of reception, for in this way they can themselves experience the dialogical activity which has produced the results. It is particularly important, however, for the leaders of both churches to engage officially in the reception process and to decide on the ecclesiastical and ecumenical status of these documents.

76. Another necessary step towards unity occurs when that fellowship in faith which has been given to us is actually practised by means of a common *witness to Christian faith* for which both sides assume responsibility. Joint services of the word are already being held in many places. There should be closer cooperation than before on the mission field. Wherever possible, joint radio and television broadcasts on behalf of the Christian message should be arranged. In many countries, it appears extremely urgent to arrive at close Catholic-Lutheran cooperation in the school systems, and in any case, the churches have a joint responsibility for the Christian education of children and young people. There are also responsibilities for working together in the field of both theological and non-theological Christian literature, as has been shown by cooperation between Roman Catholic and Protestant publishers and by the collaborative production and translation of Roman Catholic-Protestant writings. Extensive opportunities also exist in the fields of church music and fine arts.

77. What can be said in general regarding the *pastoral responsibilities* of the churches is that no one church can single-handedly carry on the work of evangelization in a secularized or traditionally non-Christian society. Moreover, the very credibility of the Christian witness is here at stake. In so far as varied circumstances in the different countries allow, there should be joint planning of pastoral care in new housing developments, in

⁴⁸ Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, No. 11.

⁴⁹ Cf. especially Malta and *The Eucharist*

hospitals, at universities and colleges, and in work with children or youth. "Ecumenical bridgehead communities" could result, which might provide examples and stimuli for pastoral care in traditional congregations. Pastoral care for confessionally mixed marriages presents a particular area of Christian responsibility. It is of decisive importance for Christian witness whether such families develop into nuclei of ecumenical understanding or into battlefields of separated traditions which, in the end, lead to alienation from the faith.

2. Community of Hope

78. Christian faith lives in an attitude of hope. Spiritual fellowship in faith necessarily becomes fellowship in hope. The hope, which "does not disappoint us" (Rom 5:5), is our support on our way towards each other. All the "steps towards unity" mentioned above, and all those still to be considered, are possible only if we are carried forward by our common hope. Sin is not only the deepest cause of our separation, but it also leads us again and again to setbacks and manifestations of discouragement on the way to each other. Our hope is in the faithfulness of the Lord who continually triumphs within our sinful hearts and desires to lead us to final and complete communion. In spite of everything, therefore, he gives us courage anew to take new steps towards each other.

79. Our hope, however, is not solely concerned with our own road towards Christian unity, but is also focused on the *salvation and redemption of the world as a whole*. We are empowered in this all-embracing perspective to give an "accounting of hope" against both resignation and Promethean self-assertion, and are encouraged to take together those concrete steps of hope which are at the same time "steps towards the unity" of our churches. Such steps of hope are taken in the knowledge that all the scientific, technological and humanitarian progress of the world cannot bring redemption. Instead, Christ will return to judge and to establish a new world. Yet in light of that coming, signs of the future can already be raised aloft in the world as it now is.

80. Steps taken in hope are such signs of Christ's future. They occur where Christians and churches offer themselves in *service* to suffering people, in service to changing those social conditions which in part cause human suffering, and in service to overcoming the worldwide dangers arising from the ecological crisis. They occur where Christians accept hope as an invitation to risk.⁵⁰ This service, based on common hope, should be jointly carried out by Christians and churches in their diaconal and charitable activities. Appropriate joint initiatives should be developed

⁵⁰ *Sharing in One Hope*. Commission on Faith and Order, Bangalore, 1978 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979, Faith and Order Paper No. 92), VII.

or newly started on all levels. The churches should also jointly support, as much as possible, the studies necessary to carry out these initiatives as well as the liaison work with non-church authorities. Such steps of hope, which lead us both towards Christian unity and common prayer, can become signs of the presence of Christ among us as the one who bears and overcomes our maladies.

3. Community of Love

81. Christian faith proves itself in love (1 Cor 13 : 13; Gal 5 : 6), and thus our spiritual fellowship must be a fellowship of love. Such love arises from the ever new *encounter with Christ in the word and eucharist*, for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15 : 13). Thus when the community of faith takes shape as a community of love it is represented in a particularly important form in the joint celebration of the eucharist. We are saddened that the present relationships of our churches do not yet allow full eucharistic fellowship. We confess anew our longing for "the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship"⁵¹. The credibility of our witness to the world and of our very celebrations of the eucharist is menaced by our divisions at these celebrations. This suggests that the work of the Holy Spirit is not absent from the great pressure for eucharistic fellowship we are now experiencing. We shall not cease to search for possible ways to allow mutual admission to communion in special cases.

82. In place of the as yet impossible full eucharistic fellowship, we must create opportunities in which our still separated churches can unite in common *praise, prayer and supplication* for each other, for all churches and for the world, and in the preaching of the word of God and confession of his glorious deeds. This was the reason for the establishment of the week of prayer for Christian unity. This week of prayer should pose a challenge to prayer life of all of Christendom. It would lose its spiritual significance if it were demoted to an isolated annual manifestation of an otherwise non-existent ecumenical practice. It is our hope that such joint services of prayer will lead our church congregations towards a more and more perfect community of love.

83. Despite remaining difficulties, efforts should be made to promote *mutual participation* in Sunday worship, at baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and at ministerial ordinations and installations, otherwise our expressions of brotherliness will be limited to secular occasions such as receptions or other social events. In any case, quite apart from joint worship, greater *ecumenical exchange of visits*, encounters and conversations will contribute, by means of better mutual acquaintance and involvement

⁵¹ Constitution of the World Council of Churches, III.

in a common spirituality, to a deepening of a spiritual sharing perfected in love. Wherever such encounters result in unusual forms of ecumenical fellowship, even when they may seem to have gone too far, the church authorities should not pass judgment until they have had first-hand contact with those immediately involved. If they thus at least indirectly participate in ecumenical learning processes, they will be more ready to grant in love the necessary trust to those who are engaged in continuing brotherly ecumenical conversations.

84. The unity for which we hope and towards which we move as brothers on the road will not spare us conflicts. For "the Church ... is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified"⁵². It "goes on its way in sin and weakness"⁵³. The conflicts require consultations between representatives of the church leadership which should be carried on in a spirit of love and forgiveness. In addition, it is possible to form "*groups of reconciliation*", made up of representatives from both churches. These could function as independent ecumenical courts of appeal. Over and over again our congregations discover that problems of pastoral care (such as those of religious liberty, changes in church membership, use of church buildings and mixed marriages) serve as fuel for hostile actions and occasions for anti-ecumenical prejudice. Groups such as those just mentioned could provide a forum for the open discussion and resolution of minor or even major conflicts. As expressions of readiness for reconciliation and examples and signs of love and peace, they could have significance far beyond the boundaries of the church.

85. The love which tests our common faith cannot in any case remain confined to our fellowship with each other. We are rather called to undertake joint responsibilities in following the Lord in his *loving devotion* to the whole world. We must make clear in our life and in our teaching what the "new commandment" (Jn 13:34-35; 1 Jn 2:7-11) gives and demands. That is why one indispensable step is the striving for as united a witness as possible in ethical and social-ethical questions. Only when we together dedicate ourselves to the love and charity which also serves the social needs of human beings throughout the world — loved by God yet suffering in many ways — will the love which unites us be placed in the proper perspective.

d. The Form of Community

86. What are the "steps towards unity" suggested by the visible shape of our spiritual fellowship in its diversity and dynamism?

⁵² Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 8.

⁵³ Gemeinsame Synode der Bistümer, No. 4.3.3.

1. Recognition of Ministries

87. The relations between our churches continue to be troubled by the non-recognition of ministries. As is well known, Catholics and Lutherans consider this question from different viewpoints. Whereas Lutherans have "never denied the existence of the office of the ministry in the Roman Catholic Church"⁵⁴ (although, at the time of the Reformation, they made obedience to Roman Catholic bishops dependent on their permitting the Reformation proclamation), Vatican II speaks of a *defectus* ("lack") of the sacrament of orders in the transmission of the ministry in the Reformation churches.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the conviction has been growing that it is not a matter of a total absence, but instead as a "lack of the fullness of ministry", and it is not denied that the ministry in Lutheran churches exercises essential functions of the office which, according to Roman Catholic conviction, Jesus Christ instituted for his church.⁵⁶ It is especially urgent that on the basis of the present state of ecumenical understanding the responsible church authorities take whatever steps are possible towards full recognition of ministries in the context of mutual reception by the churches as a whole. This includes the broadest possible *reception of the results* of the ecumenical dialogue on the ministry, during the course of which church leaders should rethink prior positions. *Ordination liturgies*, for example, should be examined to see whether they accord with positions arrived at in ecumenical discussions.

2. Credible Practice

88. Just as the pastoral practice of ordained parish clergy is of great importance on the local level, so that *actualization of ministries of church leadership beyond the congregational level* is of decisive significance for possible mutual readiness to enter the fellowship of the historic episcopacy or of the Petrine office. Thus, a credible practice of church government must avoid the dangers of bureaucracy and anonymous administration. Policies must be understandable and concern for cooperation with all who serve in the church unmistakable. A certain quality of spiritual power — and not mere juridical competence — must be present. In these ways the directives and decisions of those who exercise oversight (or *episcopē*) will be visibly related to what actually is needed and their words will possess an intrinsic authority.

⁵⁴ Malta, No. 64.

⁵⁵ Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, No. 22.

⁵⁶ Cf. Groupe des Dombes, *Pour une réconciliation des ministères* (Taizé: Les Presses de Taizé, 1973).

3. Collaboration

89. Mutual respect and collaboration of ministers *on all levels* should be practised more extensively than heretofore. One especially important step on the way to a common episcopacy could take place through a more intensive and thoroughly institutionalized cooperation between the leaders of both churches than that which is at present customary. Consideration should be given to forming liaison groups (which might have either a more episcopal or more synodical structure) with authority to make decisions in particular matters. In any case, greater cooperation should be sought, not only on a regional basis, but also on the world-wide level.

90. Naturally *discrimination* must cease if ministers are to cooperate on all levels. Partners cannot cast aspersions on each other and must renounce every form of proselytism (though not mutual criticism or requests for change). Such cooperation, moreover, in which the partners become to some extent co-responsible for each other, provides initiation into the experience of real and legitimate diversity in the church. It is against the nature of the search for Christian unity to level down all differences in the realm of church life or to make unfair demands on one side or the other. The operative principle must here be that the changes reciprocally risked by increased cooperation should be balanced by a legitimate concern to preserve the identities and special characteristics which each side derives from its tradition.

e. All-Encompassing Community

91. Lastly what are the "steps towards unity" suggested by the all-encompassing character of the community towards which we move?

1. Fellowship of All Christians

92. The goal of full communion towards which Catholic and Lutheran Christians and churches are now moving together points far beyond itself. It points to that perfect communion which we shall have with the Triune God at the end of all time. But it also points beyond itself in the sense that Roman Catholic-Lutheran fellowship is not yet the fellowship of all Christians. We must see our rapprochement in the *context of the whole ecumenical movement*, and not least in relationship to the notable institutional expression of that movement in the World Council of Churches. A community limited to Catholics and Lutherans would not be all-encompassing, because substantial parts of Christendom (such as the Orthodox, Anglicans, Reformed, Methodists and Baptists, but also, for example, the independent churches of Africa) would be missing from this fellowship.

This would not only be a numerical loss, but also a substantive deficiency because of the absence of insights of spiritual and theological importance and the resultant lack of full catholicity. The road to Catholic and Lutheran unity must therefore be unmistakably open to the wider and greater fellowship of Christians.

93. This means we must always be alert in the Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue to what others in other traditions and churches and other bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues are saying and thinking on the questions with which we deal. The results of the Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogues can prove fruitful to other bilateral and multilateral theological discussions, but they must also be critically examined in the light of the conclusions which others reach. Our various levels of encounter with each other in worship and action must be continually open to other *ecumenical partners*. Especially significant examples of this wider cooperation are provided by national Christian or church councils as well as by various joint church working groups. These may serve as starting points for more and more intensive ecumenical fellowship. It is therefore important that the various bilateral dialogues should have the possibility of meeting together regularly in common forums. The membership of Roman Catholic theologians in the Commission on Faith and Order together with other forms of collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches suggest possibilities of even more intensive collaboration which should be realized.

2. Unity of Humankind

94. There is also another and more far-reaching sense in which Catholic-Lutheran fellowship points beyond itself. God "desires *all men* to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4) and to gather before his throne in perfect fellowship. The unity of the church is directed to the unity of humankind. We Christians have a shared responsibility throughout history for the sowing of hate and discord instead of love and reconciliation. Power, egotism and a misconceived orthodoxy have played a calamitous role in the church and through the church in the world. So also the present state of Christianity with its many divisions and impotence damages the effectiveness of its witness. Yet however modestly and reticently Christians must speak of themselves at this point, we nevertheless know that God wills to work continuously in Christianity by his saving and reconciling power and through Christianity in the world. When Christians and churches re-unite, their way of reconciliation and love could become a sign and ferment in the midst of a world rent asunder by conflicts and enmity. Yet we must remember that God, on the contrary, also calls the church to its senses through the world and through his dealings with it. The world, in other words, challenges the church in manifold ways.

95. "Steps towards unity" will be taken in this universal sense (which embraces the whole of divided humanity) whenever our ecumenical efforts lead Christians of different nationality, race, colour, culture, social and political conviction, and class background to unite in mutual understanding and join hands in mutual reconciliation. "Steps towards unity" in this wider sense, therefore, include all the efforts jointly undertaken for peace, justice and reconciliation in the world and serving to eliminate political as well as confessional images of enmity and all the self-righteousness associated with them. We need increasingly to transform the still prevalent parallel existence of the churches into an ecumenical fellowship of planning, speaking and acting on the congregational level, on the level of regional study and action groups, as well as on the level of responsibility for church government. This would greatly enhance the credibility and effectiveness of Christian commitment for *a reconciled and peaceful humanity*, and would draw all people closer together by allowing the light which comes from Christ to shine more brightly.

96. When we think of the steps that bring us closer to the all-embracing fellowship of human beings in Christ, we also know that these steps of ours will never themselves attain the hoped-for community. They are at best *Spirit-worked signs* of what Christ alone can bring to perfection when he returns after having prepared the ground for the new age through his first coming. This confidence for the future, however, should not become an excuse for the constant failures of imagination, commitment and openness which we must ever confess anew. It should rather console and uphold us in the certainty of hope even when our efforts are repeatedly frustrated by factors inside and outside the churches. It leads us finally to the adoration of him who alone is the beginning, the midst and the end of all our steps and ways.

List of Signatories

This document was signed by all members of the joint commission:

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23 February 1980

All Under One Christ

*Statement on the Augsburg Confession
by the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission*

Preface

The Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation has produced a statement on the *Confessio Augustana*. This statement was unanimously approved by the members of the Commission. It is our hope that the unanimity expressed in it may hasten the hoped-for unity of our churches.

Augsburg, 23 February 1980

Hans L. Martensen
Bishop of Copenhagen
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George A. Lindbeck
Professor, Yale University
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Joint Chairpersons

1. When Catholics and Lutherans look back to the Augsburg Confession today, we do so from a situation which differs considerably from that in 1530.

2. Though seriously threatened at that time, the unity of the Western Church had not yet been shattered. In spite of conflict and differences of conviction between them, the "religious parties" at that time still felt themselves to be "under one Christ" and committed to that church unity.¹

3. But with the subsequent course of events not only did an increasingly bitter note creep into their dealings with one another but the differences between them sharpened in doctrine, in religious practices, in church structures, and in the ways in which they sought to obey the mandate of the crucified and risen Lord and to testify to his gospel among human-kind. Non-church factors also helped to bring about this growing estrangement and to accentuate the differences. In the centuries since, these tensions and differences have been carried to other countries and other continents by the missionary work of our churches.

4. We recognize our own responsibility for the fact that these differences have divided our churches from one another and that this division has weakened our witness to Christ and brought suffering to individuals and nations.

5. It is with thankfulness, then, that we see how the Holy Spirit is leading us ever more deeply today into the unity of the Son with the Father (Jn 17:21ff.) and helping us to achieve a new community with one another.

6. Since the Second Vatican Council especially, our churches have been in dialogue in many countries and in many places. Striking convergences have been achieved and agreements reached on important controversial questions. The mutual bonds between congregations and members of our churches have led to cooperation and practical fellowship in a variety of forms. There are several differences between us which are also beginning to lose their divisive edge. Even when we must wrestle with each other for the truth, we recognize and experience many of the remaining differences as a source of mutual enrichment and correction. After centuries of deepening estrangement, there is a new sense among us that we are "all under one Christ".

7. The dialogue of recent years, the theological common understanding reached as a result of this dialogue, and the climate of real fellowship lead

¹ This is stressed in the Emperor's invitation to the Diet of Augsburg (1530) and taken up in the Preface to the Augsburg Confession, *The Book of Concord*, pp. 24f.

us back to Augsburg and to the Augsburg Confession. For, in content and structure, this confession, which is the basis and point of reference for the other Lutheran confessional documents, reflects as no other confession does the ecumenical purpose and catholic intention of the Reformation.

8. Very important, too, is the fact that this ecumenical purpose and catholic intent find expression in a confessional document which, subject to and together with Holy Scripture, is still the doctrinal basis of the Lutheran churches and still has binding authority for them even today. In the stage now reached in the understanding and convergence between our churches, this is a particularly important factor. For the character of the post-conciliar dialogue, as conducted for example in our Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission since 1967, is no longer that of private and unofficial meetings. On the contrary, it is conducted on the official instructions of our churches. Inasmuch as this dialogue has succeeded in arriving at convergences and agreements on fundamental issues,² it urges our churches to accept its findings officially and poses the question of the realization of church community.

9. It is in profound accord with this dynamic of a dialogue officially sponsored by our churches which now presses us in the direction of the realization of church fellowship that the confession which is binding for the life, doctrine and community of the church should become the special focus of our common attention and study.

II

10. The express purpose of the Augsburg Confession is to bear witness to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Its concern is not

² Reports of the official dialogue of Roman Catholics and Lutherans in the United States:

Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I-III, edited by P. C. Empie and T. A. Murphy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965).

"Eucharist and Ministry", *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV* (Washington, D. C. and New York, N.Y., 1970).

"Papal Primacy and the Universal Church", *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*, edited by P. C. Empie and T. A. Murphy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974).

"Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church", *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*, edited by P. C. Empie, T. A. Murphy, and J. A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978, 1980).

The official world level Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue: Report of the Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Study Commission "The Gospel and the Church", *Lutheran World*, Vol. XIX, No. 3, 1972 (hereafter: Malta);

Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission: *The Eucharist* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1980).

with peculiar doctrines nor indeed with the establishment of a new church (CA VII,1), but with the preservation and renewal of the Christian faith in its purity — in harmony with the ancient church, and “the church of Rome”, and in agreement with the witness of Holy Scripture.³ This explicit intention of the *Confessio Augustana* is also still important for our understanding of the later Lutheran confessional documents.

11. Joint studies by Catholic and Lutheran theologians⁴ have shown that the contents of the statements of the Augsburg Confession in large measure fulfil this intention and to this extent can be regarded as an expression of the common faith.

12. This conclusion is reinforced by a whole series of recent studies and research efforts in a wide variety of disciplines, including a number of joint studies:

— Biblical and patristic studies have made us aware of the richness of our common Christian heritage; we are now better placed to judge the extent to which the arguments adduced from Scripture and tradition in the controversies of the 16th century were valid or are now in need of correction.

— Historical studies have thrown new light on conditions in church, society and economics at the time of the Reformation, showing us the extent to which political and economic factors also contributed to estrangement and division.

— Research into doctrinal history in the Middle Ages, the Reformation and, above all, the *Confutatio* — a refutation of the *Confessio Augustana*, composed at the Emperor’s request — and the Augsburg union negotiations of 1530, has produced insights favourable to a more objective view of earlier controversies, to a defusing of mutual condemnations, and to a new evaluation of unions already achieved at that time.

13. Against this background of study and research, we are able to appeal to the Augsburg Confession when we say:

— Together we confess the faith in the Triune God and the saving work of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, which binds all Christendom together (CA I and III). Through all the disputes and differences of the 16th century, Lutheran and Catholic Christians remained one in this central and most important truth of the Christian faith.

14. A broad consensus emerges in the doctrine of justification, which was decisively important for the Reformation (CA IV): it is solely by grace

³ Cf. The Augsburg Confession (CA), XXI, The Book of Concord, p. 47.

⁴ Cf. *Confessio Augustana — Bekenntnis des einen Glaubens*. Gemeinsame Untersuchung katholischer und lutherischer Theologen. Edited by H. Meyer and H. Schütte, together with E. Iserloh, W. Kasper, G. Kretschmar, W. Lohff, G. W. Forell, J. McCue (Frankfurt/M. — Paderborn, 1980).

and by faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit in us that we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit who renews our hearts and equips us for and calls us to good works.⁵

15. Together we testify that the salvation accomplished by Christ in his death and resurrection is bestowed on and effectively appropriated by humanity in the proclamation of the gospel and in the holy sacraments through the Holy Spirit (CA V).

16. A basic if still incomplete accord is also registered today even in our understanding of the church, where there were serious controversies between us in the past. By church we mean the communion of those whom God gathers together through Christ in the Holy Spirit, by the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, and the ministry instituted by him for this purpose. Though it always includes sinners, yet in virtue of the promise and fidelity of God it is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church which is to continue forever (CA VII and VIII).

17. Reflecting on the Augsburg Confession, therefore, Catholics and Lutherans have discovered that they have a common mind on basic doctrinal truths which points to Jesus Christ, the living centre of our faith.

18. This basic consensus also comes out in and is confirmed by the documents of the official Roman Catholic/Lutheran dialogue today:

- the joint statements on the relation between gospel and church;⁶
- a broad common understanding of the eucharist;⁷
- the agreement that a special ministerial office conferred by ordination is constitutive for the church and does not belong to those elements which the Augsburg Confession denotes as "not necessary"⁸.

19. Of the second part of the Augsburg Confession in which a sometimes severe polemical position was adopted in opposition to contemporary abuses in the church, it must be said that changes have come about in the life and judgment of our churches that substantially remove the grounds for the sharp criticism expressed in the Augsburg Confession. Important doctrinal questions are also touched on in this second part. Although certain problems still require to be clarified, a broad consensus has also been achieved even in doctrines broached in this second part.

⁵ Cf. CA IV, VI and XX, The Book of Concord, pp. 30ff., 41ff.; Malta, Nos. 26 and 48.

⁶ Cf. Malta, Nos. 18ff. and 47ff.

⁷ Cf. *The Eucharist*.

⁸ CA VII, 3, The Book of Concord, p. 32; cf. Malta, Nos. 47ff.

20. In respect of the Mass (CA XXII and XXIV), this transformation in doctrine and practice has been demonstrated above all by our dialogue on the Lord's Supper. We still have different emphases, questions to put to one another and common tasks.⁹ But all these are encompassed by a profound accord in our witness to the Lord's Supper and to a large extent also in respect to its liturgical celebrations.¹⁰

21. As far as monasticism and the life of the religious orders are concerned, in view of the now prevailing understanding and practice of the monastic life in the Roman Catholic Church, it is impossible to continue to maintain the severe condemnation of them in the Augsburg Confession.¹¹ Both theologically and practically,¹² monastic forms of common life are a legitimate option for Catholics and Lutherans wishing to commit themselves to practising the gospel in this dedicated form, even though, at the present stage in the dialogue, certain details of interpretation still remain open, even within Lutheranism.

22. As far as the question of the episcopal office is concerned, here again it has to be noted that, in accord with the historic church, the *Confessio Augustana* specifically affirms its desire to maintain the episcopal structure. The assumption here was that the true proclamation of the gospel is helped and not hindered by this office. The *Confessio Augustana* affirms a ministry of unity and leadership set over the local ministers (CA XXVIII) as essential for the church, therefore, even if the actual form to be given to this ministerial office remains open.

23. Honesty in our dialogue on the Augsburg Confession also compels us to admit that there are still open questions and unresolved problems, among them the following:

— The *Confessio Augustana* does not adopt a position on the number of the sacraments, the papacy, or on certain aspects of the episcopal order and the church's teaching office.

— The *Confessio Augustana* naturally makes no mention of dogmas which have only been promulgated since 1530: the primacy of jurisdiction and the infallibility of the Pope (1870); the gracious preservation of the Virgin Mary from original sin (1854) and her bodily assumption into heaven (1950).

⁹ Cf. *The Eucharist*, Nos. 46-76.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, Nos. 1-45, and *The Liturgical Celebration of the Eucharist*, pp. 29ff.

¹¹ Cf. Vatican II, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life.

¹² Cf. the phenomenon of Protestant communes and communities resembling monastic orders.

24. These questions will have to be considered in the future dialogue. We shall also have to examine the question of the weight to be given to the differences and open questions which still remain even as our churches move closer to one another, as well as the further question of the significance of the fact that some of these differences only acquired their sharpened contemporary form in recent centuries.

25. Our newly discovered agreement in central Christian truths gives good ground for the hope that in the light of this basic consensus answers will also be forthcoming to the still unsettled questions and problems, answers which will achieve the degree of unanimity required if our churches are to make a decisive advance from their present state of division to that of sister churches.

26. The Second Vatican Council summoned Catholics to "joyfully acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage"¹³ which are found among Christians of other churches. That both Catholics and Lutherans have made a considerable advance along this road by their joint study of the Augsburg Confession is ground for joy and thanksgiving.

III

27. The common faith which we have discovered in the Augsburg Confession can also help us to confess this faith anew in our own times. This is the commission laid upon our churches by the ascended Lord and it is what we owe to the world and to humanity. This is also in harmony with the intention of the Augsburg Confession, concerned as it was in its time not only to maintain the unity of the church but also at the same time to witness to the truth of the gospel in its own time and its own world.

28. Faced as we are with new questions, challenges and opportunities in our world today, we cannot rest content with simply repeating and referring back to the confession of 1530. What we have rediscovered as an expression of our common faith cries out for fresh articulation. It points the way to a confession of our faith here and now, with Catholics and Lutherans no longer divided and in opposition to each other but bearing witness together to the message of the world's salvation in Jesus Christ and proclaiming this message as a renewed offer of the divine grace today.

¹³ Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, No. 4.

This document was signed by all members of the joint commission. For names see page 28.

Common Statement by the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission

*Lutheran World Federation
Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity
of the Roman Catholic Church*